

Great Basin MAC Fire and Aviation Safety Team

Final Report

August 15-20, 2012

FAST Members

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Introduction

On August 14, 2012 the Great Basin Multi-Agency Coordination Group (GBMAC) ordered a Fire and Aviation Safety Team (FAST) to visit several large fires in Idaho. The mission of the FAST was to gather information, provide assistance when needed and promote safe fire operations during high fire activity. The Delegation of Authority was issued to the team on August 15, 2012 and the team visited the field from August 16 through August 20. The FAST visited four Type 1 incident organizations, one NIMO team, one interagency dispatch center, and one district office.

Purpose

The Team was to conduct an independent assessment and evaluation of operational and managerial activities on incidents throughout the Great Basin. These assessments could also include support organizations, dispatch centers, and Coordination Centers if necessary. The Team was tasked to specifically review the following elements:

- a. Fatigue management and compliance with national guidance on work/rest
- b. Effectiveness of incident support, readiness, dispatch, communications and Coordination Center support
- c. Incident Management Team staffing and specific safety mitigations
- d. Smoothness and effectiveness of IMT transitions, especially from extended attack or Type 3 IMT's to Type 1 or Type 2 IMT's
- e. Safety issues arising from the use, or lack thereof, of contracted or local resources such as volunteer fire departments
- f. Recognition by managers and incident staff of the unusual fire conditions faced throughout the geographic area and any positive or negative safety implications of response actions for initial attack, extended attack, and aviation operations
- g. Any issues the IMT, local unit line officer or FMO ask the team to address

Schedule

August 15 - FASTeam met at NIFC in Boise ID.
August 16 - Visited Minidoka Complex (Lund). Returned to Boise, ID.
August 17 - Visited Springs Fire (Hahnenberg). Returned to Boise, ID.
August 18 - Visited Trinity Ridge Fire (Harvey). Traveled to Ketchum, ID.
August 19 - Visited Halstead Fire (Houseman). Traveled to Salmon, ID.

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August 20 – Visited Mustang Complex (Joseph). Traveled to Pocatello, ID.

August 21 – Traveled to Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center, Salt Lake City, UT. Finalized report.

August 22 – Close out with Great Basin MAC. Traveled to Boise, ID.

Methods and Procedures

Incident Commanders, local dispatch and Agency Administrators were contacted prior to each visit. It was emphasized during initial contact that the FAST mission was to gather information for trend analysis and to promote safe fire operations. With approval, the FAST scheduled and facilitated an in-brief with the ICs and other command and general staff. Hosting units were notified and invited to attend.

Interviews were conducted with appropriate staff at the ICP. Due to the distance between the ICPs and their fires, the FAST only made one fire line visit. The FAST held a closeout meeting with the IC and other command and general staff. A report for each incident was sent to GBMAC, ACT and the hosting unit.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issues identified in this report are not new and some have been identified in the past. It is hoped that improvement actions can arise from these recommendations. If appropriate, consider posting these findings on the Lessons Learned Center website.

Dutch Creek Protocol

This issue was a major concern on all incidents. Teams are diligently pursuing procedures and resources necessary to ensure rapid patient care and transportation with a goal of meeting the “golden hour” and striving to meet the new direction.

Issues

- Dutch Creek Protocol guidelines and expectations are not clear and need to be clarified as it relates to dedicated resources for treatment and transportation.
- Inability to acquire and maintain Type 3 High Performance helicopters to meet medical evacuation needs throughout the life of the incident.
- Teams are trying to provide a higher level of patient care with line qualified paramedics (EMTP) in situations where transportation is a challenge (night, smoke, high winds, etc.).
- Teams experienced difficulty acquiring line qualified paramedics (EMTP) and ALS resources.
- Finance sometimes rejected or delayed requests for resources that provide treatment and transportation.

Recommendations

- Implementation of the Dutch Creek Protocol can be complicated on an incident. Further discussion on development of a clear, simple process to allow for alternative means to meet requirements needs to be developed i.e. use of line paramedics, ALS, ambulance, risk avoidance, altered strategy and tactics, etc.

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- Teams should utilize all available aviation resources to meet medivac requirements, including local unit aviation, Life Flights, military, and private. Consider the need for litter kits on government contracted aircraft.
- Local units should begin fact finding, negotiations and establish agreements with emergency medical resources before fire season so teams don't have to attempt this on an incident.
- Expanded dispatch, finance, IBAs and others who approve requests for medical resources (paramedics, medical supplies, ALS, ambulances) should be educated on the Dutch Creek protocols.
- Need to have a distinction in ROSS for line qualified paramedics (EMTP) like there is for EMTs (EMTB).
- Share the increased use of line EMTPs as a strategy for other IMTs.
- If the Idaho Air National Guard Medivac Helicopter agreement is implemented, the teams need to understand the mobilization process so they can access it.
- Exploration of hoist capabilities on agency Type 2 exclusive use helicopters should be encouraged, including purchase of hoist equipment and development of a training program.
- An IMT conducted a successful emergency medical incident exercise that simulated two simultaneous injuries. Local emergency management agencies were included in the exercise. This effort should be encouraged elsewhere as this practice is part of the Dutch Creek Protocol.

Resource Capability and Availability

Ground Operations

Issues

- Unavailability of Type 1 crews was a significant concern for all IMTs.
- Type 2 crews were often deficient in fitness, configuration, equipment and experience level.
- Some out of region crews required considerable medical support upon arrival and throughout the incident.
- Several ICs expressed concern that the pre-positioning pendulum had "swung too far the other way" affecting resource availability for large fires.

Recommendations

- Given the rugged terrain and the high potential for growth, the right resources, i.e. IHCs, is more critical than the number of personnel. Allocation of resources should be made considering this fact.
- Type 1 crews and mechanical equipment (feller/buncher) should be used to minimize exposure to hazard trees in bug kill.

Contract Engine Crews

Issues

- Some crews were unable to perform requested tasks indicating minimal fitness requirements were not being met.

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- Teams have witnessed contract deficiencies that include issues with performance of engine personnel.
- Crews are swapped out on contract equipment and are being assigned to other incidents without required rest periods.
- Individuals entering fire camp presented themselves as contractor employees and the teams had no means of verification. This is a potential security issue.
- An incident with a preponderance of contract resources handed out more than 400 IRPGs which may indicate a contractor training issue with the IRPGs.

Recommendations

- Change contract engine evaluations to include a pass/fail for the engine and use the crew performance rating to rate contract engine crews.
- More contracting inspectors are needed to ensure contractors are meeting work/rest ratios between incidents as well as other compliance monitoring.
- A mechanism, such as ID cards, needs to be put in place to clearly identify the designated contractor's representative and contractor employees to the receiving IMT.
- Contracting officers should ensure IRPGs are distributed to contractors prior to season and that contractors are trained in the use of IRPGs.

Air Operations:

Issue

- Cumulative fatigue is a growing concern for both aviation personnel and aircraft. Exclusive Use crews are of less concern than CWN crews but all are at increased risk due to the high ops tempo. In addition, experience in the current geographic areas is limited based on recent fire seasons.

Recommendation

- Consider Phase 2 and/or Phase 3 of Interagency Interim Flight and Duty Limitations (Red Book) for aviation resources as needed.

Supplies/Cache:

- It took three days to get pre-ordered 100 Person Medical Kits.
- A team had to drive to Boise to get Radio Kits because the cache could not deliver them.
- Some are concerned that lunches do not meet the intent of requested contract changes. Crews require high quality nutrition and the current lunches contain too much sugar and lack protein increasing risk of injury or heat related illness.

MSR and 209 Processes

Issues

- The MSR process appears to be redundant to the 209, especially with a different MSR for the MAC and ACT. The additional workload doesn't appear to provide value to the team as they are

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still not receiving requested resources. The process overall has been burdensome for the team with changes to reporting times, no standardization, and the requirement for ROSS, 209 and the MSRs to match despite different submission times.

- The current 209 has limitations related to clearly reporting strategies and tactics. One IMT stated their strategy is actually “Values driven suppression with limited perimeter control” which is essentially a combination of all available strategies in the 209.
- 209 Injury Reporting – Instructions are vague and result in inconsistent reporting reducing the ability to use data for trend analysis. Examples: pre-existing conditions that result in lost duty time or demob, contractor injuries, etc.

Recommendations

- For MSRs, the MAC and/or ACT should share knowledge of available resources with the team so they know what is actually available to ease preparation of their requests and better manage expectations.
- Clarify and define MSR requirements and processes before the next fire season kicks off.
- A standardized 209 that captures the MSR requirements for MAC and ACT would ease the burden on the IMT.
- Elevate issues identified for 209 reporting to NWCG Risk Management Committee and Fire Reporting Subcommittee for clarification and standardization.

Bug Kill / Hazard Trees

- High concern over the risks associated with crews working in high bug kill / hazard trees areas has driven tactics and strategies.

ATV/UTV

Issue

- Differing policy regarding equipment requirements between USDA and DOI causes confusion and increases management complexity; these policies need to be reconciled.

Recommendation

- Develop ATV Helmet Kits, including ear buds, to be maintained at the cache and issued with ATVs to ensure safety guidelines are met.

Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR)

Issues

- A difficult situation arose due to the need to allow local civilian air traffic to access their primary business interests.
- There was no TFR in place over one fire prior to the second team’s arrival which was a significant safety concern for air attack group supervisor and other aviation resources.

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Recommendation:

- Teams should mitigate by adjusting the TFR and engaging in extensive collaboration with the community.
- Enforce requirements for TFR on any fire with multiple aircraft.

Traffic

- Highway traffic management has been an issue due to rolling rocks, snags and smoke. Teams have been mitigating this through the use of pilot cars and collaboration with IDOT.

Smoke

- Smoke was identified as a risk to fire fighters and the community. Mitigations include: ordering air quality specialists, additional air quality planning, monitoring and coordination.

Area Closures

- One team utilized National Guard resources to staff 25 security points to protect area closures.

Communications

- Boise National Forest Interagency Dispatch Center
 - When field going personnel transmit at the same time on the north and south base stations, the communications walk on each other. Dispatch experiences a humming sound and the field personnel are unaware of the conflict. This issue was raised in the Forest Service Safety Journey last fall. FAST recommended Dispatch file a SafeNet.
 - Radio technicians are agency CIO assets and the Center is experiencing poor support. BLM has provided support when possible. FAST recommended the center order a radio technician while agency radio techs are not available.
- On incidents, communication issues were minor and mitigated at the incident level.

Use of Trainees

- Efficient use of trainees has been a challenge. Teams would like to increase the use of trainees.
- There have been efforts made at regional levels to prioritize trainees. It would be good to make these lists available to teams. A national database of high priority trainees may be particularly beneficial.

Transitions

- Transitions at all levels have been smooth.
- NIMOs are uniquely positioned to reduce the negative impacts of transitions because they can provide continuity across the life of long term incidents. The team has been able to provide some overlap of personnel to support transitions.

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Cooperators

- Coordination with local non-federal fire response units appears to be well managed with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Excellent coordination with local units – local units provided terrain knowledge, support with traffic management, and proactive communications with residents.
- One incident team was able to support the community with the completion of an evacuation plan that the community had identified as a need for quite some time.
- Coordination with the local communities has been complex due to the economy's reliance on outdoor recreation. This appears to be generally well managed by all teams.

Fatigue

- With the exception noted for aviation, the team observed that fatigue did not appear to be an issue and that work/rest and length of assignment guidelines were being adhered to.

Regional Fire Conditions

- The teams are well aware of elevated fire potential. Safety bulletins issued by the Eastern and Western Great Basin were recognized by the IMTs. Team strategy and tactics were based upon these conditions.